THE VITAL BALANCE

WORK AND FAMILY ISSUES IN THE ALBERTA PUBLIC SERVICE

92-01558/

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THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

"Revolutionary forces are confronting traditional work-family arrangements at home, in the community and at the workplace. As families, communities and corporations struggle with trying to achieve some type of balance, the challenge for finding new models and structures for healthy and productive families and corporations has never been greater."

Dr. Bradley Googins,
Associate Professor and
Director of Work-Family Centre,
Boston University

In the last three decades, Canada has experienced major social, economic and demographic change.

Birth rates have declined. The number of senior citizens has steadily increased. The baby boomers are aging, and they aren't producing enough children to replace themselves in the workforce. At the same time, economic changes, the cost of living, and technological progress have all introduced new stresses and opportunities for labour force participants.

In response to these changes, more and more women have entered the workforce as full-time participants. Dual income families have become the norm, and the majority of pre-school children receive care from people who are not their parents. In response to the increase in female labour force activity, and to actual shifts in societal attitudes, more males are sharing in family responsibilities. And, family responsibilities themselves have changed. A growing number of seniors and people with disabilities are being cared for in a family environment, as community living arrangements become the preferred option.

These forces have served to shape the workforce of today, in which many working adults are attempting to balance work with family concerns. Employment is highly valued, but the stresses and demands of work and home often leave employees feeling torn in their commitment to both an employer and a family. This stress, in turn, affects the quality of their family relations, workplace productivity and lifestyle satisfaction.

The new generation of worker has higher expectations of personal satisfaction. Economic success alone is no longer considered sufficient reward. In the words of Daniel Yankelovich, market researcher and author, social values have shifted from an "ethic of success" to an "ethic of self-fulfilment."[1] More and more, workers are looking for responsive and flexible employers who respect this new work ethic.

The ability of organizations to accept and effectively respond to the changing labour environment will influence their ability to attract and keep valuable employees in the face of the predicted shortage of skilled workers. Similarly, the ability of individuals to balance and integrate their work and family lives will affect their ability to participate and contribute effectively in both environments, and will have long term effects on our society as a whole.

Thus, both managers and employees in the Alberta Public Service have a large stake in developing the means to adjust to the new realities of work and family in Alberta. For the Alberta Public Service to remain a dynamic organization that attracts and retains employees, support mechanisms alone are not enough. What is required is a philosophy and structure which clearly indicate a strong commitment to the value of achieving a vital balance between work and family responsibilities.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

There are three important demographic trends which will dramatically affect the workforce and employers of the 1990s.

- **Decreasing fertility rates.** In 1960, Canadian women had an average of 3.9 children. Today that figure has more than halved, to approximately 1.7 children per woman.

- **The "greying" of the population.** In 1960, 7.6% of Canadians were 65 years of age and older. In 1986, 11% of the population were 65 years and older. It has been estimated that by the year 2036, close to 25% of the population will be in this category[2].

- **A shrinking labour pool.** Both the decreasing fertility rate and the increasing number of individuals 65 years and older will contribute to a declining number of individuals in the future labour pool.

These trends are increasing the importance placed on workforce participation by women, new Canadian immigrants, and older citizens. The most recent of these trends, the push to attract older workers, is already apparent in the service sector and will continue to broaden into other sectors as the labour pool continues to shrink.

As a result of seniors becoming a larger proportion of the population, and working parents forming the majority of the work force, the '90s will be characterized by the very small number of labour pool participants who do not have family obligations.

THE WORKFORCE OF THE '90s

Work and family can no longer be considered separate or independent spheres. In the days when only father worked, the presence of mother at home allowed employees to draw a clear line separating family from work. While on the job, employees could devote all of their time and energy to their careers, secure in the knowledge that family needs were being met.

Today, the workforce is very different. The "traditional" family structure is no longer the norm, and today's worker juggles multiple roles and demanding schedules which are often structured in ways that conflict. The effort involved can result in stress both at home and in the workplace.

The workforce in the 1990s is characterized by:

- **more dual-earner families, with parents combining the responsibilities of child-raising with the requirements of their paid work;**
  - *As of 1986, the number of dual-earner families in Canada was 53%. If only one parent in these households worked, the number of families below the poverty line would increase by 78%.*

- **more women of all ages and at all stages of their life;**
  - *Since the Second World War, women have entered the labour force in unprecedented numbers and are remaining there for an average of 34 to 37 years. Alberta women have the highest participation rate in the country, dramatically increasing from 12.7% in 1911 to 63.8% in 1990.*
  - *Between 1975 and 1990, the largest increase in participation occurred among Canadian women aged 35-44 years. Almost 82% of women in this age group are active in the labour force.*

- **more women with children, especially mothers of young children;**
  - *Most women with children participate in the workforce, whether or not they are in two-parent households. About 80% of all women with school aged children participated in the Alberta labour force in 1990. When children are of preschool age, 61.7% of women in two-parent households and 54.9% of women in one-parent households are active in the Alberta labour force.*

- **more single parents;**
  - *By 1986, 61.2% of all single parents were in the labour force. While 82.2% of single parent families were headed by women, the number headed by men continues to grow.*

- **more sharing of family care responsibilities by men;**
  - *Studies indicate that men are becoming increasingly concerned about maintaining a work and family balance that will allow them to share the responsibilities for child and elder care.*

- **more employees with responsibility for the care of elders or people with disabilities.**
  - *Two out of five people over 30 years of age provide some kind of elder care. One and a half million Canadians with disabilities are wholly or partially dependent on others for their care. Both these trends will continue to increase in the 1990s, as seniors and people with disabilities are encouraged to choose community living rather than institutional options.*

THE CONTEMPORARY FAMILY

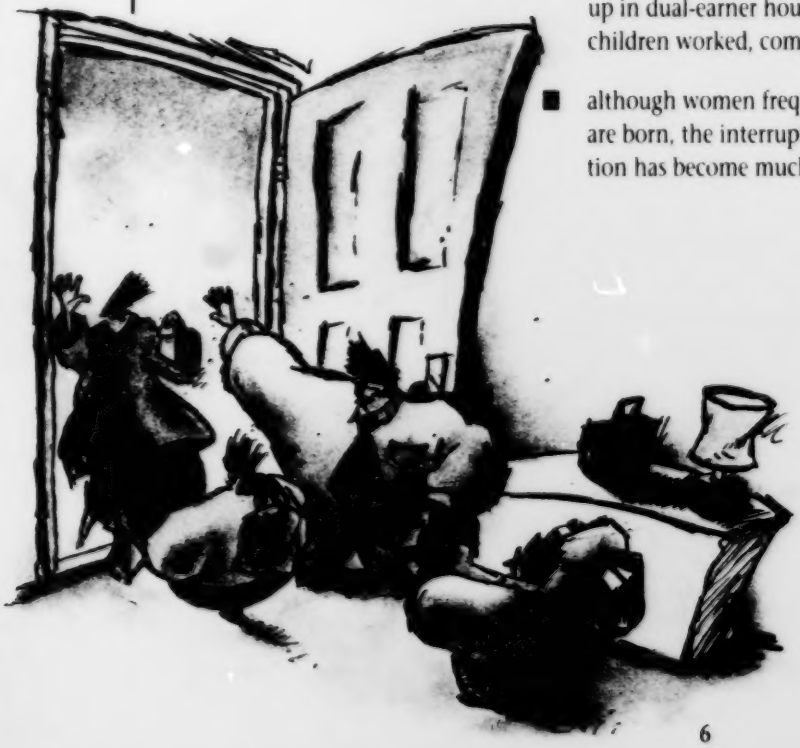
"I don't make enough money for my wife to stay home and look after our children."

Alberta Public Service
Balancing Work and Family Survey;
male with children,
Professional/Technical

New Family Realities

Some of the new realities of Alberta families are that:

- three out of five husband/wife families are dual-earner families. In contrast, only 11% of Alberta families represent the "traditional" family concept, with dad working for pay while mom acts as homemaker and child care provider. Thirty years ago, only 11.2% of married women in Canada participated in the workforce[3];
- the overwhelming majority (about 85%) of Alberta children grow up in dual-earner households. In 1989, 69% of mothers with small children worked, compared to 49% only 10 years earlier[4];
- although women frequently interrupt their careers when children are born, the interruption is not permanent. In fact, the interruption has become much shorter in recent years.



New Family Structures

The employment of parents, particularly mothers, has produced shifts in family roles and social structures. At the same time, the actual structure of the family has evolved to include many new definitions of family composition. In fact, to characterize the Canadian family in the 1990s is very difficult. Today's family might have:

- two parents with children;
- one parent instead of two;
- two adults with children from one or two marriages;
- parents in a common-law relationship;
- children whose parents live in separate residences;
- children who live in one home for part of the year and in another for the balance of the year;
- same sex partners living with or without children;
- couples with no children at all; or
- two or three generations of family members living together.

While the structures and functions of the family have changed and become more diverse, a basic premise remains. The "family," in whatever form, provides for the needs of family members. Today, that responsibility falls, in most cases, on the shoulders of those with full-time demands and obligations in the workplace.

The Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families concluded that a family could be defined in terms of the roles a family plays, but that no one definition could encompass the variety of forms a family may take.

The Council identified the roles that a family is expected to fulfil as:

- care and maintenance of family members;
- addition of new members through procreation or adoption, and relinquishment at maturity;
- socialization of children for adult roles;
- social control of members;
- production and consumption of goods and services needed to support a family; and
- promotion and maintenance of family morale, motivation and healthy lifestyles.

New Roles and Responsibilities

In the past, women were primarily responsible for providing or arranging for the care of family members. Today, full-time responsibility for the family and home is no longer feasible for most women. Whether through economic necessity or personal preference, more women are combining a family with a career. In the process, they are searching for ways to achieve an integration and balance between their work and family lives.

Paralleling this shift in women's roles, men have also experienced a change in behaviour, attitudes and expectations. For some, increased participation in family care is a necessary by-product of a dual-earner family. But for many men, this increased caregiving role reflects a genuine desire for shared participation in family responsibilities.

The fact is that men are becoming more involved in parenting. This is a significant behavioural change from male spouses of the past who, even if their wives worked for pay, seldom participated in household or child care tasks. This change in men's roles actually reflects a larger societal movement of change in attitudes regarding work, family and the costs of career success.

Men and women are looking for ways to have both career success and satisfying family lives. But, according to Hall[5], many men feel that they must keep their family care responsibilities to themselves, thus perpetrating an "invisible daddy tract." Men are reluctant to share information about balancing work and family because they want to be seen as dedicated careerists who, by

definition, do not take time out during the workday to address family concerns. For a male to do otherwise, says one, "not only will my career be impacted but I'm going to be seen as some sort of funny guy."

Yet the Balancing Work and Family Survey indicates that, like their female colleagues, men are experiencing difficulty in balancing their work and family responsibilities:

- 49% of the men who responded to the survey said that "the combined demands placed on me by my work and family are stressful." This compares closely to the 51.4% of women who answered likewise;
- 27.4% of men, compared to 30.1% of women, indicated that "I personally experience problems in balancing work and family responsibilities;"
- 19% of the men stated that "I am expected to do most of the household tasks." While this remains the largest gap between male and female responsibilities (63.9% of women answered likewise), it does point to a growing number of men who are assuming primary responsibility for maintaining the household.

"My family responsibilities involve care and contact with aging parents, although they are not living with me."

Alberta Public Service
Balancing Work and Family Survey:
female with no dependents,
Professional/Technical

"Because I work the normal 8-5 hours Monday to Friday like everyone else, I am unable to attend to many of my family's requirements that have to be conducted during normal business hours (medical, school, etc.)."

Alberta Public Service
Balancing Work and Family Survey:
male with children,
Administrative Support

It is clear that the role of fathers as well as that of mothers is changing. Therefore, for work and family issues to be addressed in a meaningful way, managers must recognize that workplace flexibility is important for both male and female employees.

Caring For Dependents

More than two million Canadian children younger than 13 years of age have parents who work or study. The stress of combining parental and employment responsibilities is of particular concern to employers in the 1990s, because the caregiving resources available have not yet matched the demand for arrangements which are flexible enough to accommodate the schedules and needs of workers.

Arranging for child care can require a considerable amount of time and effort, and can cause employee stress if the search is unsuccessful or unsatisfactory. This strain becomes even more acute when a child becomes ill, when a parent works seasonally or in shifts, or when school-aged children need care outside of school hours. Most parents have few options which are available, affordable and of high quality. Single parents are hit hardest in the child care dilemma, because they often must cope with even fewer financial and human resources than their two-parent counterparts.

For today's workers, children are not the only family members in need of support and care. Senior citizens are living longer, and living in family environments for longer than ever before. One of every 10 Canadians in 1986 was 65 years of age or older. By the year 2036, one-quarter of all Canadians will belong to this age group.

Given that the average Canadian married couple now has between them more parents than children, we can expect elder care to quickly join child care as the working parents' predominant area of concern. For many, caring for aging parents, grandparents, or relatives with disabilities is often very complex because of the scope of health, housing,

nutrition, emotional and social needs which must be met. Adults have many options available to help them learn about parenting, but the resources which help them cope with the needs of adult dependents have not yet developed to their fullest extent.

> **"Among a representative sample of 1,345 adult Albertans surveyed in 1991, 35% said they were currently involved in providing care to an elderly relative and 18% said they had taken, on average, 8.5 days away from work for elder care during the past 12 months. Clearly, issues of dependent care are important for both employers and employees, and it is essential that resources and strategies be identified to address these issues for the benefit of all stakeholders."**
>
> Allison L. McKinnon
> Ph.D. candidate,
> University of Alberta

The increase in adult dependents is occurring at a time when the number of women entering and staying in the labour force is continuing to rise. This creates a situation where fewer women are able to provide day-to-day care for dependents, and fewer women are in the volunteer sector which traditionally supplements family support.

In addition, in a growing number of households, working adults are responsible for providing care to both older and younger generations of dependents at the same time. People who contend with these two sets of demands simultaneously are referred to as the "Sandwich Generation." It has been suggested that an individual will parent for 17 years and spend another 18 years caring for an elderly parent or relative.

> **"I need time off to handle problems with aging parents who do not live in the city."**
>
> Alberta Public Service
> Balancing Work and Family Survey;
> female with aging dependents,
> Management

Workers who are primary caregivers for dependents have great difficulty balancing their work and family responsibilities. The demands of dependent care require an enormous commitment of time, emotional and physical energy as well as financial resources, and the strains and stresses of providing this care can spill over into the workplace when conflict arises. For this reason, flexibility in the workplace has become as important a consideration to new employees as an employer's benefit package.

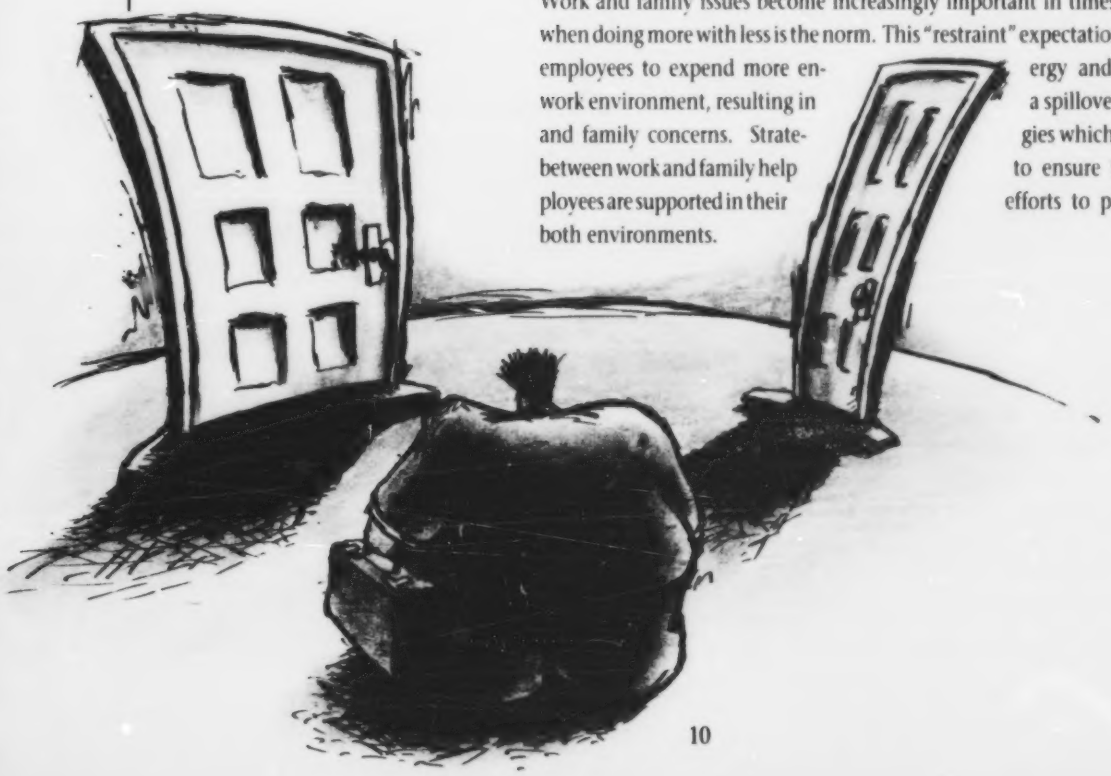
> **"Illness of dependents is the most difficult issue, and inability to attend school functions disappoints my children and makes me feel guilty."**
>
> Alberta Public Service
> Balancing Work and Family Survey;
> female with children,
> Professional/Technical

THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGE

In today's competitive world, organizations need an edge to keep ahead. The ability to attract and retain valuable employees is critical to successful operations. Organizations which recognize the interdependence of work and family life, and which develop policies and practices that address this issue head-on, will have a definite advantage over slow-to-change organizations.

The object is to become an "employer of choice" for quality employees. Managers who do not recognize and respond to work and family concerns will lose out in this competition. Valuable employees will choose the organizations which provide the best "fit" to their individual needs, and they will be drawn away from organizations not willing or able to provide for those needs.

Work and family issues become increasingly important in times such as these, when doing more with less is the norm. This "restraint" expectation often requires employees to expend more energy and time in their work environment, resulting in a spillover between work and family concerns. Strategies which reduce discord between work and family help to ensure that good employees are supported in their efforts to perform well in both environments.



Many family obligations cannot be put off for the hours before and after work. The situations that arise during working hours by definition affect an individual's performance, as there is considerable overlay and spillover between what goes on in the workplace and in the home. For example, when a child is ill, the employee may have no other alternative than to stay home. Another example is helping an elderly dress or bathe each day, which can require up to 9 hours each week. Many of those who reported lost time in the Conference Board of Canada study stated family responsibilities as the reason for their absence.

(MacBride-King and Paris, 1990)

The Hidden Costs

Many employees experience stress resulting from work and family conflict. In organizations which do not recognize and respond to that stress, there is a distinct relationship between work/family conflict and absenteeism and employee turnover. In addition, there is an unmeasurable cost in lost productivity due to lateness, fatigue, or time taken to make dependent-care arrangements through telephone calls or appointments.

The Conference Board of Canada surveyed more than 11,000 employees in 1,600 public and private organizations, to gather information on work and family issues. More than 10% of respondents stated they had left a job in the past because of problems balancing work and family demands. Another 14% were considering leaving their present job for the same reason.

Two-thirds of those surveyed by the Conference Board reported some difficulty balancing work and family, while 20% reported it to be "very difficult" or "difficult." Those who found the balancing problem very difficult reported missing 4.5 days from work in the six months prior to the survey, as compared to only 2.5 days by those who reported no balancing difficulties.

High rates of absenteeism and employee turnover are a critical concern when a shrinking labour force ensures a shortage of skilled labour. Again, the competitive advantage will be held by organizations which create a workplace environment that is open and supportive of workers with family needs and concerns.

An additional cost is seen in the loss of career development and advancement of valuable employees. An increasing number of employees are not taking on major projects or promotions if their organizations are unwilling to accommodate family commitments.

In the Conference Board of Canada study, more than 30% of respondents felt that their child care or other dependent care responsibilities had diminished opportunities for career advancement. These employees were unable to put in extra hours or relocate when asked. Another 17% of employees turned down promotions and close to 25% refused transfer opportunities because of family reasons. Half of the respondents indicated a willingness to work longer hours to advance their careers, but approximately 52% said that their home responsibilities made this very difficult if not impossible.

In short, the ability to balance work and family responsibilities affects absenteeism, employee morale, turnover, and career development. Each, in turn, affects the successful operation of the organization. It is clear that managers must respond by encouraging, developing and participating in strategies which address the interdependence of work and family concerns. To become an "employer of choice," and to ensure maximum efficiency in operation, the well-being of employees must be viewed and supported as critical to the success of the organization.

"I would love to and need to upgrade, but being at work all day, I feel guilty having to leave home in the evening, especially when there are chores to be done."

Alberta Public Service
Balancing Work and Family Survey:
female, single parent,
Administrative Support

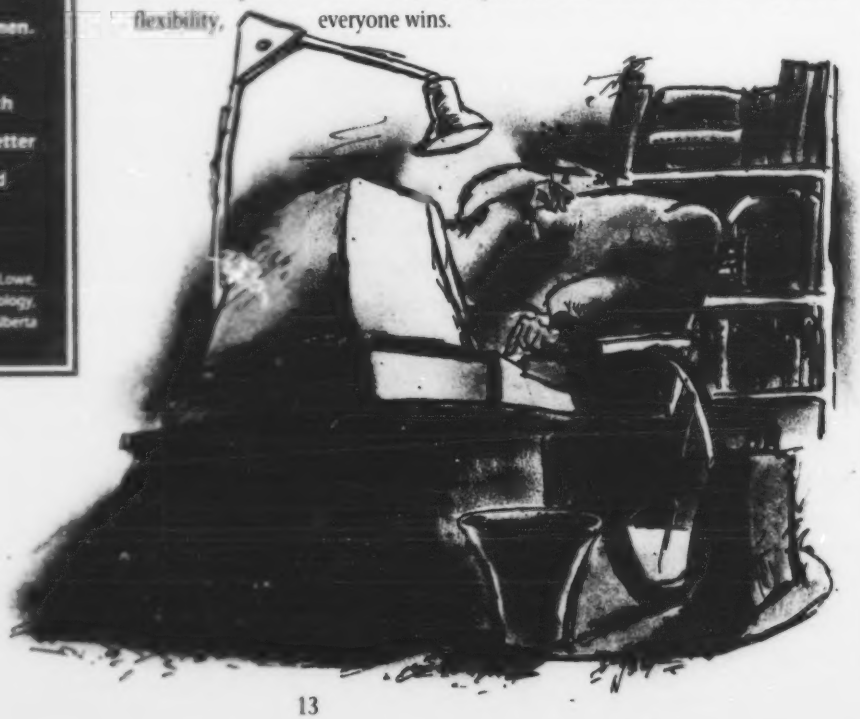
Family/work conflict also costs organizations when valuable employees cannot or will not obtain further education. Workers who have a difficult time achieving a work and family balance are very reluctant to add the strain of educational demands to their existing time, energy and resource commitments. Responses to the Balancing Work and Family Survey seem to support these findings: 43.3% of all respondents stated that "family responsibilities limit my ability to take educational or upgrading programs."

If managers want to encourage the growth and development of their employees in order to respond to the needs of clients and changes in technology, organizations will have to allow for both satisfying family lives and productive careers.

RESPONDING TO THE NEW WORKPLACE REALITIES

> "To become an employer of choice, managers must strive to develop family-friendly policies which address the needs of both women and men - yes, men. This requires human resource strategies which help all employees to better integrate their work and personal life."
>
> Dr. Graham Lowe,
> Department of Sociology,
> University of Alberta

The Alberta Public Service is committed to being an employer of choice, attracting skilled employees dedicated to excellence in performance. To fulfil that objective, family-supportive policies have been developed to provide employees with the tools and resources they need to meet the challenge of achieving the vital balance between work and family. Together with managers, employees are working to develop arrangements which allow them to contribute the best they have to offer in the workplace and at home. With this increased flexibility, everyone wins.



Becoming An Agent of Change

As with most organizational change, managers are the lynchpin of success.

Flexibility is essential in work scheduling so that the Alberta Public Service can remain a viable organization, with sustained productivity and performance. For flexibility to be effective, however, managers must be knowledgeable about and responsive to the needs of employees. When work/family conflict arises, managers must be well informed about the options available to help employees cope with the demands of both environments. And, when alternative work arrangements are being discussed, managers must be responsible for helping employees solve their problems in ways that also benefit workplace operations.

> **"Balancing one's personal and career roles is challenging in today's fast paced society. Managers and employees can together create a supportive work environment which helps overcome this challenge."**
>
> Jennifer Koury and Jennifer Heath,
> Esso Resources

Frontline managers are not alone in this task. Successful change requires commitment at all levels and in Alberta this begins at the top, with Labour Minister, Elaine McCoy.

"There is a new dynamic in the workplace, one that requires an immediate response and commitment," says McCoy. "Conflicts between family and work responsibilities affect our operations, and we need to respond with a flexibility that provides our employees with workable solutions to potential problems affecting them and their work."

In today's fast-paced environment, change is the norm rather than the exception. While the sheer pace of change is sometimes daunting, those who can respond quickest have the advantage. The Alberta Public Service has developed its response to the new workplace realities, and it is up to individual managers to become, indeed, the agents of this change.

Creating A Supportive Environment

For managers, the first step to enacting change is identifying the existing needs. Through the Balancing Work and Family Survey, employees have indicated that they can no longer cope with a complete separation between the two spheres of work and family. In response, managers can create an environment which is supportive to employees who have family conflicts or concerns. This environment requires a willingness to discuss work and family issues, and an ability and commitment to adapt to family needs.

Given the variety of forms a family can take in today's world, this means that managers need to listen to their employees, to learn about the challenges and issues faced by each individual, and to demonstrate their understanding and concern.

Managers can start by recognizing the reality of the employees "fog period" — the early morning and late afternoon transition periods when employees are shifting from their family role to their work role and vice versa.[7] In response, managers can schedule meetings and other important work events outside of these periods. This ensures that employees are fully integrated into their work role when necessary, and helps alleviate potential conflict and stress if employees experience dependent care crises which require early morning or late afternoon attention.

A supportive atmosphere will also support the ability of employees to take leave for legitimate reasons, without guilt or fear of reprisal.

Although it may not be possible to eliminate the need for overtime in some areas, managers and employees can discuss ways to approach overtime requirements. Together, they can find ways to deal with these situations while causing the least possible disruption to employees' family lives.

If an employee decides to temporarily postpone career advancement due to family commitments, managers can play a vital role in demonstrating the person's continued value as an employee. Participation in development opportunities such as projects or training programs can be encouraged to maintain the employee's current skills and enthusiasm, and to continue to build skills for the future.

On the other hand, managers can also create a working environment which precludes the need for employees to postpone their careers. They can ensure that relocation is not a prerequisite to advancement. They can recognize effective employees rather than "workaholics." They can also provide alternate work scheduling options that allow the employee to better manage both spheres of his or her life.

In a supportive work environment, managers will recognize that alternate work schedules and other flexible approaches can meet both the organization's and the employees' needs. Managers will also realize that they hold the ultimate responsibility for working with individual employees to find the solution that works best for each situation.

Employee/Manager Communication

The development of flexibility in an organization is a joint responsibility of managers and employees, requiring two-way communication throughout development and implementation.

Managers must learn to communicate the government's expectations and objectives of introducing work alternatives. Managers must also learn how to negotiate work arrangements which meet the needs of both the employee and the organization.

Employees must learn to communicate their needs and concerns about work and family conflict. And, they must be prepared to ask for and accept shared responsibility for maintaining the expected standard of workplace operations.

Practical options for promoting communication on work and family issues can take many forms, all aimed at encouraging input from throughout each department. Communication opportunities can be incorporated into new or existing structures such as committees, discussion groups, performance reviews and employee surveys. Or, as is currently the case in some departments, a special task force on work and family can be established. Pilot programs can be developed and supported in order to measure effectiveness for employees and the organization. The results of these pilot programs can then be shared with other departments.

Without these increased communication efforts, a government-wide attempt to address work and family issues will fail. To succeed, each department must provide input aimed at problem identification and the development of appropriate and workable solutions to work/family conflict. The direct result will be a more holistic approach to integrating work and family life, as equal and complementary priorities.

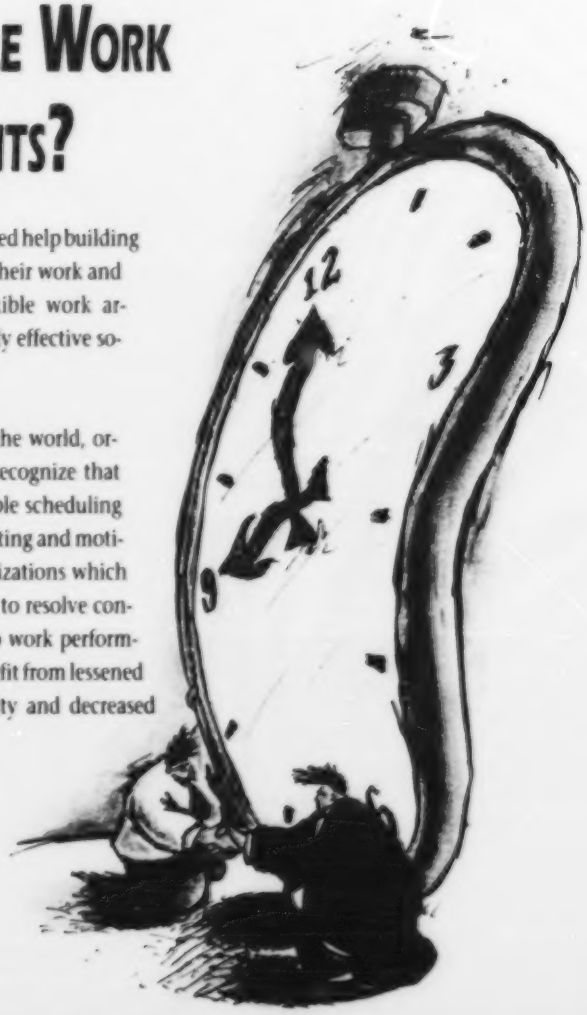
FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS IN THE ALBERTA PUBLIC SERVICE

> **"Family-related programming is not corporate philanthropy. These human resource policies and practices represent a realistic response to the changing needs of the labour force. We have found that when organizations implement family-responsive benefits and programs, employees win and employers win."**
>
> Judith MacBride-King,
> Health Human Resource Planner,
> Province of New Brunswick

WHY FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS?

When employees need help building bridges between their work and family lives, flexible work arrangements can be an extremely effective solution.

Throughout the country and the world, organizations are beginning to recognize that those which do not offer flexible scheduling may have a difficult time recruiting and motivating talented people. Organizations which provide employees with a way to resolve conflicts which can spill over into work performance, are employers which benefit from lessened turnover, increased productivity and decreased absenteeism.



Increasingly, employers are recognizing that when employees seek alternative or reduced hours of work it is merely a reflection of an existing conflict. The employees' commitment to work and productivity is not in question. In fact, those who step forward to find workable solutions to their problems demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring that their work performance doesn't suffer from family conflict. For some, the ability to secure a suitable form of flexibility may mean the difference between whether they stay with or leave the Alberta Public Service.

"If a manager comes to us for advice on how to help employees balance work and family, we'd tell that person to go into a room with those employees, without any books or regulations, at least to begin with. We'd tell them to start by brainstorming: What do we need to run this operation and what do we need to change to allow your work and family life to be better balanced?"

Lorne Saul-Demers and
Karen Lickacz,
Labour Relations Consultants,
Personnel Administration Office

Experience shows that if employees help develop flexible work arrangements to fit their individual needs, they work hard to make sure the arrangement is successful. And, when a manager has worked closely with an employee to negotiate an agreement that works for both of them, the chances of success grow even stronger.

The best alternative work schedules are developed with well defined goals, established feedback mechanisms and a clear understanding of expectations. However, the most important factor in this formula is individualization — no one solution works for everyone. As a guideline to developing these solutions, a number of alternative work options have been developed. From these, managers and employees can create the work arrangement which meets their needs.

Full-Time Alternative Work Schedules

FLEXTIME

The Deputy Head may implement a flex hours system if:

- the total hours of work as specified in the master and subsidiary agreements are not exceeded;
- government offices are open from 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday - Friday inclusive, except for paid holidays unless the deputy head or delegate orders otherwise.

Personnel Manual for Bargaining Unit and Opted Out/Excluded Employees.

Flextime arrangements occur when a manager and employee negotiate "windows" of time in which the employee is expected to arrive and leave work. For example, because of dependent care responsibilities, an employee may need the flexibility to arrive any time between 8:15 a.m. and 8:45 a.m., and may need to leave any time between 4:30 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. The actual arrival and departure times can vary each day, as long as they fall within the agreed-to periods.

Flextime schedules always work around daily core periods in which the employee must be at work — 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Employees work with managers to develop a flexible schedule for the remainder of their required hours, ensuring that work occurs between 7:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m., with a minimum half-hour lunch break.

Employees who have a flextime arrangement receive their regular monthly salary. If the arrangement results in fewer or additional hours worked during the month, employees

> "More than 46% of respondents to the survey reported that flextime would be useful to them now. A further 12.4% felt it would be useful in the future."
>
> Alberta Public Service
> Balancing Work and Family Survey

are allowed a 10-hour carryover. This 10-hour carryover can be worked off (if it is a "debit") during the next month, or applied to banked time for time off.

Flextime users report that it is a low-cost and effective family benefit which raises morale while enabling the organization to improve coverage, extend service hours and/or reduce or eliminate tardiness.

The provisions for flextime are outlined in Articles 16 and 17 of the Master Agreement and in Part V, Section D-8 of the Personnel Manual for Opted/Out and Excluded Employees.

In the fall of 1988 the Work and Family Issues Advisory Committee at Career Development and Employment conducted a survey of department employees to get their views on certain work and family issues. One of the three most important issues raised was the need for more flexible working hours. As a result, the department prepared and distributed an information package which included 10 options for alternate work arrangements for employees consideration. One stipulation was that each individual unit, in conjunction with their manager, would agree on the work schedule that best met their personal and organizational needs. The manager would then make the final decision based on these discussions. That option became the scheduling arrangement for all employees in the unit, except for those who preferred to remain on their normal schedule of 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Although 10 options were made available, most employees chose either the compressed work week (as part of the Personnel Administration Office's pilot study) or flextime.

THE FACTS ABOUT FLEXTIME

Flextime is a popular low cost benefit. It is especially valued by working parents as a way to better manage work and family time. Generally, it has a very positive effect on employee morale.

Flextime is often a workable solution to tardiness, and it provides employees with the ability to resolve scheduling problems or last-minute crises (dressing an elder, getting a child off to school, finding care for a sick child, transit problems, etc.).

Flextime can be an attractive and effective recruitment and employee retention tool. At the same time, it can allow organizations to improve work coverage and extend hours of service.

Productivity is positively affected, through:

- reductions in paid absences;
- better organization of work, because meetings, telephone calls and visits are concentrated in core hours;
- the ability for individuals to work according to their own scheduling needs;
- improved morale and satisfaction; and
- the worksite benefits of better management aimed at facilitating rather than controlling.

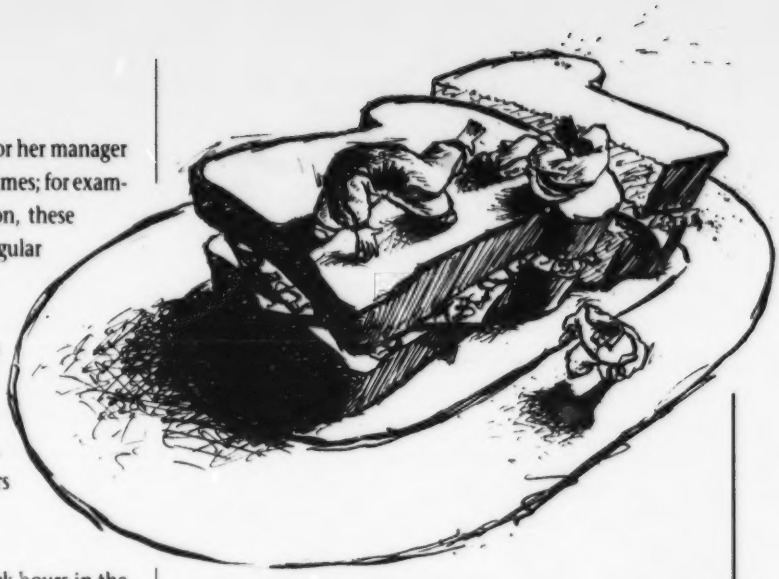
On the other hand, productivity can be negatively affected by difficulties associated with employee communication, scheduling of meetings and coordinating work among employees. And, without proper coordination, flextime can negatively affect work coverage and adequate staffing during certain hours.

STAGGERED HOURS

With staggered hours, an employee and his or her manager negotiate alternative starting and finishing times; for example, 7:30 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. Once agreed on, these times are fixed, and employees work the regular number of hours for their classification.

As with flextime, staggered hours can help managers meet peak periods or extend service to the public while allowing employees the flexibility of meeting other commitments. Unlike flextime, there is no banking of hours with this option.

There is no direct reference to staggered work hours in the personnel regulations or the collective agreements. However, to ensure that the Subsidiary Agreements and Regulations are met, staggered work agreements should be developed in consultation with departmental human resource staff.



As of November 1, 1990, employees in the Registration Branch of Alberta Health were given the option of negotiating, with their individual supervisors, hours of work that were outside the normal 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Managers and supervisors in the Branch were in turn encouraged to accommodate all such requests for "flexible hours" wherever operationally feasible. As a result, the majority of the Branch's 200 or so staff are currently working a variety of work schedules based on their own personal needs and the organization's requirements. They can negotiate a start time as early as 7:30 a.m. and a quitting time as late as 5:30 p.m. Some have also negotiated shorter lunch hours, from a one-hour lunch to a 30 or 45-minute lunch break. The only stipulation is that the hours for each individual must be scheduled and approved before hand, and any changes to the agreed on scheduling must also be approved in advance. Managers in the Branch feel that their "flexible hours" program has contributed to a more positive morale amongst employees, without negatively affecting operations.

LONGER OR SHORTER LUNCH HOURS

If an employee requires a bit of flexibility in work hours, a lunch hour agreement may be the simplest option. Alberta Public Service employees usually have one hour for lunch, but this can be extended up to 1 1/2 hours or decreased to a minimum of 1/2 hour upon agreement between a manager and employee. The employee works the normal number of daily hours for his or her classification, but has extra time to devote to personal or family responsibilities.

For example, some working parents might find it useful to start a half hour later in order to see their children off to school, and to take only a half hour for lunch to make this up. On the other hand, someone who was interested in "working out" over the lunch hour might arrange to come in a half hour early and take an extra half hour at lunch. Physical activity is an important consideration of today's employees — 59% of respondents to the Balancing Work and Family Survey expressed their interest in a physical fitness facility on or near their worksite.

Reduced Hours of Work Arrangements

Part-time work may not be feasible for many employees, but the Balancing Work and Family Survey showed that some feel they would benefit from this option. A full 9.8% said they would like shorter daily work hours now, and 11.8% said they would like them in the future. In addition, 11.7% said they would like to job share now, and 15.9% said they would like to do so in the future.

PERMANENT PART-TIME

Permanent part-time employees have a permanent job with part-time hours. Benefits are prorated according to the number of hours worked.

Usually, permanent part-time employees are in one of two arrangements:

- working the normal five days per week, but with reduced daily hours; for example, half-time employees who work a half day, five days each week;
- working the normal hours in a day, but fewer than five days per week; for example, a half-time employee who works three days one week and two days the next, or 2 1/2 days each week; or a part-time (60%) employee who works three days each week.

Traditionally, part-time positions were established to meet organizational needs, but increasingly, these arrangements are being used to meet specific employee needs so that the organization can retain valued employees.

SHORTER DAILY HOURS

Shorter daily hours is a form of part-time employment. Employees and managers can negotiate a shorter work day so that workers can meet their family needs, and employers retain valued employees. For example, parents with school-age children may want to work from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in order to be at home before and after school.

The hours of work are consistent every day, and the total number of working hours is always divisible by 10 so that benefits can be prorated.

Shorter work hours may not always be the best scheduling option from the manager's point of view. Employees should be prepared to discuss ways to minimize the impact of their proposal on the organization's operations. This will help both manager and employee come to an agreement which suits the needs of both.

A working mother in the Personnel Office of the Attorney General department is able to get her children off to school before leaving for work, and to be at home when they return in the afternoon. About three years ago a permanent part-time position was set up to meet the needs of the branch and when a working mother was recruited to the position, the hours were arranged from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. so that she could be at home for her children's before and after school needs. After a year or so, that employee went on to a full-time position in another department, and the working hours attracted another woman in similar circumstances. According to Don Dawson, the Personnel Director, "it doesn't matter when she does the work - the important thing is that the work gets done. This arrangement works well for both the employee and our operation."

JOB SHARING

Job sharing occurs when managers and employees agree that the duties and responsibilities of one permanent full-time position can be voluntarily shared by two individuals. Salary, leave of absence and employee benefits are all prorated depending on the percentage of time each employee works. Fixed premium benefits such as life insurance and health care are contributed at the full rate for each employee.

"I am currently working half days in a job share position. This is a wonderful opportunity to perform both jobs well and with satisfaction."

Alberta Public Service
Balancing Work and Family Survey:
female with preschool dependents,
Professional

Employees sharing one job are often more productive than their full-time counterparts. They stay longer at their jobs, because stress and burnout are reduced. In addition, vacation and illness leave can often be covered off effectively by the other partner.

Right now, the Alberta Public Service has 150 job sharing arrangements operating primarily in administrative support and professsional/technical positions.

Sections 8-13 and 8-14 of the Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual outline provisions for job sharing. There is also a guidebook available to help ensure that job sharing arrangements are successful. Ask your human resource representative for a copy.

SEASONAL

Seasonal arrangements occur when there is employment available for a certain period of the year, according to the volume of work. Employees who choose seasonal work view the main benefit as the option to participate in the labour force for shorter periods of time. Managers benefit by meeting the demands of peak activity periods with added temporary staff.

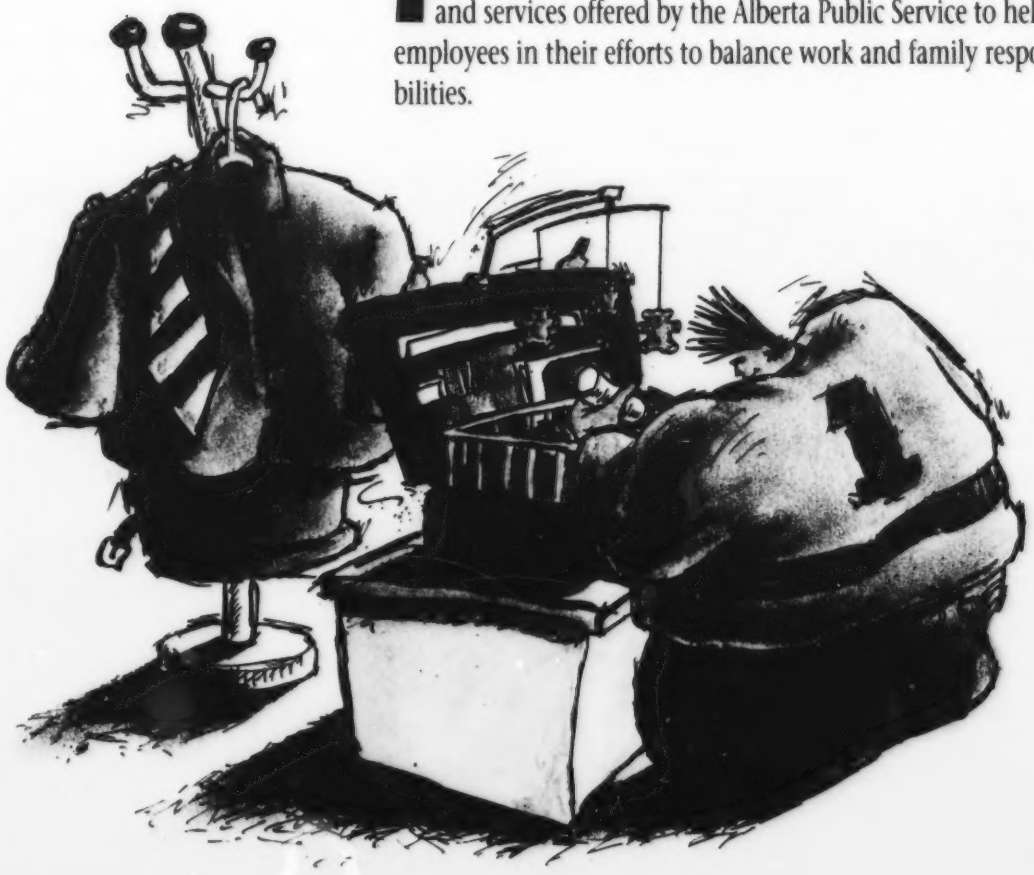
Managers who wish to explore the seasonal work option should refer to subsidiary agreements and their human resource representative.

"Alternative work schedules are most successful when both employees and managers truly buy into the process from the start and remain flexible during its operation. Communication before formal implementation, so that both parties understand each others' needs, is crucial to success."

Lorne Saul-Demers and
Karen Lickacz,
Labour Relations Consultants,
Personnel Administration Office

OTHER BENEFITS AND SERVICES FOR ALBERTA PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES

In addition to the flexible work scheduling options outlined in the previous section, there are a number of other benefits and services offered by the Alberta Public Service to help employees in their efforts to balance work and family responsibilities.



Maternity/ Parental / Adoption Leave

MATERNITY LEAVE

Maternity leave, in effect, ensures that valued employees will be re-employed by the government upon completion of their leave. Maternity leave of up to six months without pay is available to employees who have completed one year of continuous service. This can be extended up to an additional three months upon the request of the employee and approval by the department. At the minimum, pregnant employees must take six weeks of maternity leave immediately following the actual date of delivery, and should give written notice at least two weeks before maternity leave is to commence.

PARENTAL LEAVE

Men want more parenting options available to them than was the case in the past, and employee leave provisions reflect that change. In the Alberta Public Service, six months parental leave without pay is available to male employees who have completed one year of continuous service and who will have the actual care or custody of a newborn child. The leave begins immediately following the birth of the child.

ADOPTION LEAVE

Adoption leave provisions are very similar to those for maternity leave, and are available to both men and women. An adoption leave of up to six months without pay is available to employees who have completed one year of continuous service. The leave begins immediately after the employee receives the child, and can be extended up to an additional three months upon the request of the employee and approval by the department.

Special Leave

There are certain situations in an employee's life which require time away from work, and the Public Service has introduced provisions to accommodate those special needs. Employees are entitled to up to 10 paid days leave per calendar year, pending approval from their supervisor, for special purposes as follows:

- illness within the immediate family - four days;
- bereavement - four days;
- travel time for illness within the immediate family or bereavement - three days;
- administration of estate - two days;
- moving household effects - one day;
- disaster conditions - two days;
- writing examinations for courses approved by the department - as required;
- serving as a pall-bearer or mourner at a funeral - one day;
- attendance at the birth or adoption proceedings of the employee's child - one day;
- attendance at a formal hearing to become a Canadian citizen - one day.

The Master Agreement and appropriate regulations provide additional information on each of these provisions.

Leave of Absence

> "The most valuable resource I could receive is time off without penalty to my career. This is not an issue of time off with pay."
>
> Alberta Public Service
> Balancing Work and Family Survey;
> female with dependents,
> professional/technical

In addition to the Special Leave provisions, there may be times or situations when leave without pay is an important option for employees. Because longer leaves may require cover-off arrangements, employees should discuss this with their manager as far in advance as possible and at least two weeks before the planned leave. Approval will usually be granted if operational needs can be met. Details regarding benefits coverage can be obtained from your human resource representative.

Employee Funded Leave Program

With the Employee Funded Leave Program, employees can defer a portion of their salary in order to receive it during a future leave of absence period. This helps employees finance leaves to pursue activities such as:

- being at home with children;
- continuing education;
- attending to family matters such as the care of elders or a sick or disabled family member;
- travelling; or
- generally rejuvenating.

Through the Employee Funded Leave Program, employees can defer a portion of their salary (not less than 10% and not more than 33 1/3%) over a period of one to six years before the leave commences, and can take a leave of six to 12 months.

For example, employees can:

- *defer a third of their salary for two years and take the following year as leave at two-thirds of their full time salary; or*
- *defer 20% of their salary each year for five years and take the sixth year off at full salary.*

Employees can use the leave period for any purpose as long as it does not contravene the Federal Income Tax Regulations or the Alberta Public Service Code of Conduct and Ethics.

The specific provisions of the program are outlined in Directive No. 11-17 of the Personnel Policies and Procedures. Your human resources representative can give you additional information.

Dependent Care Assistance

Dependent caregivers frequently experience extra stress and strain that can have an impact in the workplace. For employees who find themselves struggling to meet the demands at home, the effects in the work environment can be serious — reduced career advancement, restricted travel and overtime flexibility, increased absenteeism, increased turnover, and reduced productivity.

Employees need to know that they are not alone in their battle. They also need to know about the many community services available to assist in child and elder care. Human resource representatives can help, and several publications are available through other agencies.

Your Departmental Personnel Office or the Personnel Planning and Career Development Branch, Personnel Administration Office at 422-4282, can provide you with:

- Elder Care Services Resource Listing
- Child Care Services Resource Listing

The Alberta Day Care Programs Branch of Alberta Family and Social Services can be contacted directly at 427-4477 for:

- Choosing a Day Care Center, A Guide For Parents
- Choosing a Family Day Home, A Guide For Parents
- Child Care Options

The City Of Edmonton Community and Family Services, Children Services Program has the following information available by contacting 496-5837:

- A partnership in Out-Of-School Care
- "Out of School Care" -A History and Standards
- How to Choose Quality Out-of-School Care

Diagnostic and Referral Service

The Alberta Public Service provides a Diagnostic and Referral Service to help employees and managers who are experiencing difficulties on the job and at home. Certified psychologists provide assistance on a strictly confidential basis.

You will be helped to identify your specific needs, and will receive a referral to the resource person or agency best able to provide the assistance you need. Managers can also request advice and assistance regarding their efforts to help an employee who is experiencing problems.

Anyone who feels they might benefit from talking on a confidential basis to a member of the Diagnostic and Referral Service, is encouraged to call them at 427-7108 in Edmonton or 297-3358 in Calgary.

BENEFITS AND SERVICES AVAILABLE TO

ALBERTA PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES

TO HELP THEM BALANCE WORK AND FAMILY RESPONSIBLITIES

- **FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS**
  - Flextime
  - Staggered Hours
  - Longer or Shorter Lunch Hours
  - Permanent Part-Time
  - Job Sharing
  - Seasonal
- **MATERNITY/ADOPTION/PARENTAL LEAVE**
- **SPECIAL LEAVE**
- **LEAVE OF ABSENCE**
- **EMPLOYEE FUNDED LEAVE PROGRAM**
- **ELDER CARE RESOURCE LISTING**
- **CHILD CARE RESOURCE LISTING**
- **DIAGNOSTIC AND REFERRAL SERVICE**

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Footnotes

[1] (Woodbury, 1990: 8)
[2] (Parliament, 1990 a, b)
[3] (Employment and Immigration Advisory Council, 1987)
[4] (Parliament, 1990)
[5] (Hall, 1990: 8)
[6] (Wall Street Journal, Nov. 1, 1988: B1)
[7] (Hall and Richter, 1988)